

Welcome to Hawkins by Kamije Celeek

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Summary: Moving from Chicago to small-town Hawkins made any possible summer plans Mike had obsolete. Then he met best friends Dustin and El while they were investigating the weird and supernatural things in Hawkins, and he joined them in an effort to make his summer suck less. But this goes deep and Mike wasn't prepared for any of it.

1. Meet El and Dustin

Summer break.

Every kid's favorite time of year. No school, no homework to bog them down. It's just seemingly-endless days of fun and adventure that make memories to last a lifetime. Swimming, biking, camping, playing video games—all just taking it easy and enjoying being a kid.

Unless you're me.

"SHIT!"

I swerved to avoid the giant beast coming after us.

"It's getting closer!" The girl behind me dug her fingers into my shoulders while hanging on to me for dear life. A curly-haired boy screamed, "SHIT!" over and over as he pedaled to keep up with me.

My name is Mike. The girl digging her fingers into my shoulder blades is my new friend El. The guy with curly hair and an explicit vocabulary is her best friend, Dustin. You might be wondering what we're doing riding bikes through the woods, fleeing from a creature of supernatural horror. Rest assured: there's a perfectly logical explanation.

You see, my family was from Chicago. Big city—third largest in the country, in fact. I liked living there enough. I'm not exactly *popular*—okay, I'm the D&D nerd—but still! I had a couple of friends and I was looking forward to spending the summer with them.

Then suddenly, my parents got a divorce and my sisters and I ended up moving with our mom back to her hometown. She'd always tried to convince my dad to move us back there but he never went for it. Hawkins, Indiana was too small a town for him and his business. I think it was one of *many* reasons they got divorced, but probably the biggest reason is that neither of them were *happy*. Mom ended up getting a big payout, though, and he's supposed to send a check every month.

Unfortunately, we hadn't found a house in Hawkins yet, and we ended up moving in with Mom's old friend, Joyce Byers. Joyce was actually divorced too, but in her case, it had been years since it had actually happened and she was used to it. She also had two sons—one was the same age as my older sister Nancy, and the other one was my age; we got along pretty well, actually.

But, this wouldn't be much of a story then...

Hawkins is a pretty small and normal town, all things considered. There's assholes who think they're hot shit, bitches who turn down their nose the second they see a guy they think is even *remotely* unattractive, and stupid people who take everything too seriously.

Luckily for me, it's also a great place to ride a bike around and try to figure out your life.

That's exactly what I was doing when I went out that day. I was just trying to put everything into perspective and failing miserably. Everything in my life had shifted in just a month and it was hard to adjust. Nancy told me I was angry at the world because I was just a stupid kid who didn't know any better.

"Screw this," I muttered, staring at the creek I'd stopped at. It was kind of pretty in a nature sort of way and I found myself wishing something interesting could happen for once.

"SHIT, SHIT, SHIT!"

I perked up at the sound of a guy screaming. I could hear hurried footsteps through the few leaves that littered the ground and somebody panting.

"RUN, EL! FUCKING RUN!"

Suddenly from the trees ran a boy with curly hair wearing a baseball cap. Right behind him was a girl wearing a white shirt with a flannel jacket tied around her waist over her jeans. She had shoulder-length brown hair that was held away from her face with a pink headband. Each of them carried a backpack. The boy tripped over a rock as he made it over the creek and the girl stopped to help him.

"El, run!" he begged.

"I'm not leaving you!" she insisted, pulling him to his feet.

"Well, finally decided to play nice?" sneered a guy with dark hair, running out of the trees. Two cronies of his came out, too, and I was suddenly pushed back into El and her friend. "I see two of the biggest *nerds* in town have found a third!"

"Back off, Troy!" El snapped, forming a human shield between the mouth-breather and us.

"No way, Hopper. Not when you and Toothless here are so close... oh, I've wanted to do this for a *long* time."

"What's going on?" I whispered to the boy behind me.

"Short version: El and I *may* have wandered into his territory while tracking something and he's pissed," the boy replied.

"Shut up, Toothless!"

"I *told* you, I have cleidocranial dysplasia," the boy insisted. "I'm not *toothless*; my teeth just haven't come in yet."

Troy sneered and started walking towards the three of us. I stupidly picked up a rock and threw it at him to try and defend the three of us, hitting him dead in the forehead.

"You're *dead*, asshole!" Troy snarled, running towards me and being stopped by El.

In a movement so fast I thought I missed it, she grabbed Troy's arm and twisted behind his back before pinning him to the ground.

"Leave us *alone*," she demanded, and he nodded. Apparently, her kicking his ass left him unwilling to beat ours.

All three ran off and the two faced me.

"Sorry about that," El told me, and I got a good look at her for the first time.

She's the prettiest girl I've ever seen.

Something about her made my heart thump in my chest. Maybe it was her caramel-brown eyes, or the way she'd just laid out a guy who easily had six inches and fifty pounds on her. I couldn't tell if it was admiration or fear. But I knew it might not be a bad idea to stay on her good side.

"I'm Dustin, and this is my best friend, El," the boy said, holding out his hand. I shook it, looking from Dustin to El and back again.

"I'm Mike. I just moved here a week ago."

"Well, Mike, I appreciate your assistance to myself and Lady Hopper. Now, if you'll excuse us..." He dug into his pocket and pulled out a compass.

"Um... would you guys mind if I tagged along?" I asked. "I don't have anything else to do."

"Negative." He looked at me with a frown. "This is party business. You're not in our party."

El bit her lip and looked at him with those wide eyes that I thought were so pretty. Dustin realized what was happening and shook his head.

"El, come on! Really?"

"Please?"

"Fine. But only because I know you'll kick my ass later if I don't."

I followed them through the woods (El promised we'd come back for my bike later) and realized that Dustin was trying to find whatever he was tracking with his compass. El moved with the confidence of somebody who knew the woods well and spent a lot of time there.

"So, if you guys are a party, what are your classes? I was always a Paladin when I played back in Chicago," I said, trying to make conversation.

"I'm a Bard," Dustin replied.

"Mage," El added. "We have a Cleric and a Ranger in our party, too. But neither of them could make it today."

"Are either of them girls, too?"

"El's the only girl in Hawkins who plays Dungeons & Dragons," Dustin snorted. "It's why she's so unpopular despite being prettier than 95 percent of girls in our grade."

"That and people just think I'm weird." El shrugged; obviously it didn't bother her. "Dustin was the first kid who was ever nice to me, so I stick with him."

"Well, if you guys will let me, I'll join your party. I've been writing some campaigns for if I ever found a new group to hang out with..."

"Okay, you're in." I stared at El for a moment, and Dustin nodded.

"Lucas is a terrible DM and none of us can write campaigns that are very interesting. Game's fun, but there's never many surprises."

I could feel a smile spreading across my face. Back in Chicago, the group I'd played the game with called me the D&D Sadist because I wrote a lot of brutal campaigns that they loved, but it took a toll on their characters. They weren't as *hard-core* as I was and it was great that there was a group out there that *wanted* the brutal campaigns and unpredictability I tended to give out.

"Movement."

I stopped and stared at Dustin, who was staring at his compass. El looked, too, and her eyes widened. They changed directions and I had no choice but to follow.

Then I saw it.

A building in the distance, overgrown and white, looking more sterile and official than anything else other than straight-up *abandoned*. Dustin and El were looking straight at it and El seemed to be celebrating.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Hawkins National Laboratory," Dustin explained. "Or, that's what it *used* to be. The lab itself shut down in the eighties for mysterious reasons, but everyone knows it's because of Project MK-Ultra."

"Project what?"

"MK-Ultra—an effort by the CIA to fight the communists during the Cold War. They used LSD, sensory deprivation, and all sorts of other twisted shit to learn how to control people's brains. Nobody knows how far it went because most of the files on it were destroyed in '73 when it supposedly shut down officially."

"That's... kind of cool. But why are you guys looking for the lab? This is a normal town where nothing ever happens."

"That's where you're wrong, Mike. Back in 1983, this girl went missing and they never found anything. Then the lab came out a year later and said that they covered up her death because a chemical leaked from the grounds. But there were a couple people in town who said that the scientists there opened a door they shouldn't have... and Barbara Holland paid the price."

"Holy shit."

"Yeah. This town's been weird ever since, but that's what the Party does when we're not in school or playing D&D. Or video games. We *investigate*."

I stared at the lab some more.

"So the lab is the epicenter of the weird?"

"That was El's theory. Her grandma was a MK-Ultra test subject."

El nodded.

"She said that they opened a 'gate' in the lab and that something came through. They couldn't close it so they just abandoned the lab. Now we get all sorts of stuff—vampires, werewolves..."

"I saw a gnome once," added Dustin.

If I had been anybody else, I would have called them insane and walked away right there. But I was Mike Wheeler and El was so nice and pretty and Dustin was so earnestly dorky that I couldn't. So I stayed.

"We've been trying to find the lab for a year now," Dustin continued. "But every time we try, we end up driven back to town by Troy and his stupid friends. Today's the first day we've seen it."

El reached into her backpack and pulled out a camera, snapping a picture of the lab. She and Dustin high-fived before she turned to me, offering me the same. I accepted and briefly felt how smooth her hand was before she smiled again.

"Okay, time to go," she announced. "We'll come back tomorrow, now that we've found it."

"You're not going in?" I inquired.

"Hell no! We're here for observation *only*," Dustin corrected. "If we go in there—two, maybe *three* kids—we'll either get ripped to shreds by whatever's in there or we'll trip some kind of alarm that'll notify the police. And I don't want to be arrested."

Well, at least he was realistic.

"Come on, let's go back," El stated, putting her camera back. The three of us started heading back towards the creek where I'd left my bike. As we walked, I felt a creeping sense of dread building and tried to ignore it.

"It was nice meeting you two," I said once I reached my bike. "Maybe we can meet up for D&D some time."

"Yeah, maybe," agreed El.

"Did you guys hear that?" Dustin sounded panicked. The three of us were silent for a moment before we heard it. A branch breaking, heavy footsteps, growling, breathing...

El's eyes widened as the beast sprang from the undergrowth, snarling at us. Dustin was heading across the creek already—presumably running for his bike.

"El, come on!" I urged her, patting the seat behind me. She accepted and clung to me as I made it across the small footbridge.

We met up with Dustin and started heading towards town, which is where you came into this story.

"What is it?!" I yelled.

"Demodog! Less talking, more riding! To the Byers!"

The Byers. They knew the Byers. And adding to that the fact that Will (the Byers who was my age) had told me that he played D&D just a couple days earlier...

Will's in their party, too.

I turned towards home (I guess that's what it was for now) and pedaled like my life depended on it. Because it fucking *did*—mine *and* El's.

I barely knew this girl and I wanted to protect her.

Will was outside working on an art project when we pedaled up and Dustin yelled out his name.

"WILL! GET THE BAT!"

He ran for the shed and came out with a bat that had several nails pounded into it. Dustin threw down his bike and El hopped off mine. I ran to join them and Will handed Dustin the bat.

"COME AT US, YOU SON OF A BITCH!"

The Demodog (that's what Dustin had called it, right?) snarled and started stalking towards us. I realized Dustin was shaking with fear and he couldn't swing the bat. El seemed to notice the same thing because she yanked it out of Dustin's hands and ran towards the abomination before swinging. It connected and the Demodog yelled

before running off into the woods again, clearly terrified by the beautiful girl who could pound its ass into the ground.

"It's gone," panted Will, looking relieved.

"We found it, Will!" El told him, smiling broadly.

"You found the lab?!"

"Yep! The compass theory was right!" Dustin cheered. "Now we just need to observe and record."

"Make sure you tell Lucas; he'll be pissed if you don't."

"Trust me, we will. Have you met Mike?"

"He lives here. Of course I have."

I looked at the three friends I'd made in Hawkins so far and thought about how I'd been going to spend my summer—inside, writing D&D campaigns that would probably never see the light of day in an actual game. Or riding my bike around and feeling sorry for myself because I hated living so far away from everything I'd ever known. Or maybe finding an arcade and trying to beat high scores. Then I thought about what I'd been through that day—all of it more exciting than anything I'd experienced back in Chicago.

Government conspiracies. Secret labs. Supernatural creatures. A pretty girl who could probably kick my ass with one arm tied behind her back. Sticking with these guys would make Hawkins a *lot* less boring.

This summer... this was going to be the best summer of my life.

2. Holly and Smokey

It had been a week since I'd met Dustin and El. In that time, I'd gone out with them on more than a few expeditions to either observe the lab or check out some random spot in the woods to see what they could find. Oftentimes, we were joined by Lucas—their Ranger who didn't seem to trust me at all—and Will. The four of them knew the woods shockingly well and I found myself at the back of the pack most of the time. But I didn't mind that. I didn't mind that at all.

Because that was when El would hang back and walk with me.

"So, how exactly does a girl end up with three guys as her best friends?" I asked her.

"Well, I moved here when I was five and started school a little late. Most of the other kids had already found somebody to hang out with. I ended up sitting alone at snack time and then this kid with extremely curly hair walked up and sat down next to me. We shared some candy and boom. Lifelong friendship ignited."

"Some candy?!" gasped Dustin. "Madam, I introduced you to the wonder of nougat!"

"Nougat isn't the best and you know it!"

"She's right!" called Lucas. "Nobody likes that nasty-ass crap but you!"

"Back to what I was saying... we stayed friends and then we met Will in first grade when Troy was picking on him on the first day."

"She yelled 'my dad's gonna arrest you for picking on my friend!' and shoved Troy to the ground," Will added. "It was the first time anybody had stood up for me besides my mom and my brother. I was excited to have a friend, even if I was at that age where I thought most girls were gross."

"Anyway! The three of us met Lucas in third grade on the playground. I invited him to play D&D with us and that was it."

Honestly? I was kind of jealous. You didn't see friendships like that

every day. El was an awesome person, both inside and out, and I wanted to make sure that I could be in her exclusive little group. I still wasn't sure what El was short for (Ellen? Eleanor? Elizabeth?) and I had a feeling she wouldn't tell me if I asked. I watched her leap over a near-invisible wire on the ground as we approached a wooden cabin that seemed sketchy.

"Where are we?" I inquired.

"The Cabin," replied El. "It's basically our hangout here when we don't want parents around. Perfect for D&D campaigns."

"Her dad owns it," Dustin added.

The five of us went inside and I watched as El set up the table for our game. She'd mentioned an initiation for me, but I hadn't known what she meant. But then she pulled out a notebook as the others sat down and looked at me expectantly.

"I, Mage Jane Eleanor Hopper, call this meeting of the Party to order," she announced. "All members are currently present. I move to initiate our newest member." Her eyes turned on me. "State your class and full name for the record, please."

"Paladin Michael Theodore Wheeler."

"I second the movement to initiate him," Dustin spoke up.

"I second his second," Will agreed.

"Majority rules—Paladin Michael Theodore Wheeler is now in the Party." She wrote my name and character class down in the notebook. Lucas frowned but didn't say anything.

"Now that you're in the Party," Dustin told me, taking the notebook from El and opening it up, "you have to learn the three rules of law. Obey, or be banished from the Party."

"Okay." These guys took it way more seriously than I did.

"Rule 1: Friends don't lie. We always tell each other the truth. Rule 2: If you draw first blood, you must shake the hand of the other Party

member involved. Rule 3: Keep each other safe. Follow all of those rules, and we won't have a problem."

"Friends don't lie. Shake hands if you draw first blood. Keep each other safe."

"You got it. Now, did you bring the campaign you wrote up?"

"Yeah, I did." I pulled it out of my backpack and set up my spot to be the DM. It was the first time I'd done it since fifth grade when my old group decided my campaigns were too hard-core for them.

Fucking losers.

"Bye Mom I'll be back later!"

I ran for the door, ready to go out with El and Dustin.

"Wait a minute, Michael!" I groaned and turned to face my mother. "I'm going to be house-hunting for us today, and Nancy is off somewhere, so... I need you to babysit Holly."

"Mom, no! I'm going out, too!"

"Well, then, you can either call your friends and tell them you have to cancel or take your sister with you. It's not up for debate; you're watching her today."

Holly smiled from her place at the table and I felt my resolve melt.

"Okay... I'll take her with me."

"Just don't do anything too dangerous. She's only three!"

"Okay, okay. Ready, Hols?"

She shook her head and I watched our mother grab her purse before heading out the door. I then walked upstairs with Holly and she started putting things in her little pink backpack. Crayons, coloring books, and her favorite bear. Like the good big brother I was, I helped her put on her shoes and tied the laces before bringing her

back downstairs and packing some juice boxes for her in my own backpack. And a small lunch, too; Holly tended to whine a lot when she got hungry.

Bang bang!

"Mike, you coming?!" Dustin called through the door. I could hear El snapping at him but I couldn't make out the words.

"Come on in! I'll be ready in a minute!"

El and Dustin walked inside and Dustin's eyes immediately landed on Holly.

"Uh, you sure you can come today? It seems like you're babysitting."

"Mom said I could bring Holly with us as long as we didn't do anything too dangerous."

"Mike! We can't bring a *two-year-old*—"

"She's *three*—"

"Fine, a *three-year-old* on a hike in the woods!"

"I keep up!" Holly protested, looking up at El with her big blue eyes.

And three, two, one...

"It's fine if she comes," El said, picking up my sister. Holly grinned and put her arms around El.

I'd never been jealous of either of my sisters before that.

"Fine. Fine. Bring her." Dustin headed for the door and I picked up my backpack. Holly already had hers on and she was still letting El carry her—a surprise given her usual reactions to people wanting to carry her around.

But then I remembered who I'd been telling about El for the past two weeks. And I knew my sister—my *three-year-old*, devious little sister—was trying to mess with me. And it was *working*.

"Walk now," Holly told El and the girl of my dreams set down my little sister before taking her hand.

It was so cute and my heart was beating out of my chest.

"What are we doing today?" I asked Dustin, hoping to alleviate some of the awkwardness that was beginning to set in.

"Oh, we're going to head for a small hot-spot out in the woods. Nothing too big. Your sister will be able to keep up."

Holly made a face at Dustin and he made one right back, making her giggle.

The four of us headed into the woods and Holly managed to keep up. Every now and then, one of us would carry her for a little bit so she wouldn't get too tired. She really seemed to love El, which made me happy because if things went okay she and El would be sisters one day. But I didn't say that because I hadn't even known El for a month yet. She could have some horrible deal-breaking flaw I didn't know about. Dustin and Will teased me sometimes about my stupidly-obvious crush on her.

Within an hour or so, we'd reached the hot spot and discovered... a tree. A tree with a gooey-looking hole at the base, which Dustin crouched to examine.

"This is a small Gate," he told me. "They pop up sometimes and I call them hot spots. This is how a lot of the smaller guys get through. The big ones are in the Lab for the most part."

He grabbed some of the goop and put it in a jar he'd brought—presumably to examine later under a microscope. It kind of looked like some kind of Spanish moss. You know, the weird scraggly stuff you see hanging on trees sometimes. I'd seen it before while visiting my grandparents in Florida.

"How long will it be open?" I asked.

"Dunno. It varies sometimes. That's why we haven't gone through yet. Only one Gate seems to be permanently open, and that's the big one. These smaller ones tend to close up randomly. I'd love to go through

one someday and see this dark dimension where all this shit comes from."

Neither of us noticed that El and Holly had gone off somewhere until we turned around and found them missing. Of course we both freaked out.

"El! Holly!" I called, standing up straight.

"We're done!" added Dustin. When nobody answered, his voice dropped. "Son of a *bitch*. I knew bringing Holly was a bad idea."

We headed off to search, but the woods around Hawkins weren't exactly small. They encircled the town and created a haven for all the weird creatures that lived there—supernatural and human. Who knew where Holly and El had gone off to?

Pretty soon, though, I heard my sister babbling through the trees and found her crouching by an oak. El was nearby and trying to get Holly to stand up so they could go join us again.

"Dustin got what he needed," I told El. "We're going to head back now."

"Okay. Come on, Holly." El took Holly's hand and we met up with Dustin before heading home.

Crack.

I picked my head up at the sound of something weird. It sounded like an eggshell breaking, but I knew my mom wasn't home. She and Joyce were out with a real estate agent (again), Will was hanging out with Lucas, Jonathan and Nancy were wherever, and I knew Dustin and El weren't around, either. Dustin had to go shopping with his mom and El was out of town for a couple days. The only other person in the house was Holly, but why was she breaking eggs?

"Holly?" I called, before it happened again.

Crack.

Okay, it *definitely* wasn't coming from the kitchen. It was coming from Holly and Nancy's room. They shared it and I shared the biggest room with Jonathan and Will. Joyce and Mom shared Joyce's room while we were there. I crept up to her door and knocked just as it happened again.

Crack.

"GRAWK!"

That was weird.

"Holly Bell, I'm coming in!" I announced, opening the door. She was sitting on the floor smiling as a final *crack* came from in front of her. My eyes landed on a broken dark gray eggshell that had what appeared to be a *baby dragon* coming out of it.

"Yay!" She clapped her hands and I felt my stomach drop.

These guys are super protective of their kids. Don't ever touch the eggs.

Dustin's voice rang out in my head.

"Holly, what's going on?!"

"This is Smokey!" She picked up the dragon and it seemed to settle in her little arms. "I found his egg when we were in the woods and I brought it home because his mama was gone."

"She wasn't *gone*. She was probably looking for food."

"No, she's gone gone. El said so 'cause she saw Smokey's mama lying on the ground and she also said Smokey's gonna need a new mama. That's me." She smiled up at me proudly.

"El knew you had the egg?"

"She was gonna take him but then I said I wanted him and she let me have him."

Let you have him. Holly probably gave El the puppy-dog eyes and she gave in. It was a proven tactic that my little sister was good at and

usually got her good results.

Smokey (fantastic name for a dragon, Holly) let out a little squawk and I sighed, running a hand through my hair before running to grab my phone.

"Hey, Mike! What's up?" Dustin asked on the other end as soon as I called.

"Remember how you told me that dragons are super protective of their young?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, do they... co-parent?"

"You mean, do the mom and dad raise the hatchlings together? No. They don't. Usually the dad takes off to go hook up with some other female and give her a clutch of eggs. Kind of like Will's dad, actually. Why?"

"Um... Holly brought home a dragon egg that day we went to the woods with her. And it just hatched."

"Wait. Wait. El didn't stop her?"

"No, El's the one who said they needed to take it. Apparently, the mother was dead and the egg was gonna die."

"So how did Holly end up with the egg?"

"How do you *think*? She pulled the puppy eyes and El couldn't say no. El was going to take it and raise it."

"And it just hatched?"

"Yeah. Holly already named it Smokey."

"Okay. I'm coming over. I just finished shopping with my mom."

"Great. See you soon." I hung up and went back to Holly, who was watching Smokey chase his tail in a circle. "Dustin's coming over to see Smokey, okay? He wants to make sure there's nothing wrong."

"Okay!"

I sat with Holly for a while, watching Smokey do his whole I-was-just-*born*-motherfucker thing where he squawked it to the entire world. Then I heard the doorbell ring and watched Smokey dive under Holly's bed. I ran downstairs to let Dustin in and discovered that he was carrying a package of ground beef and a fire extinguisher.

"I wasn't sure what kind of dragon we were dealing with, but little shit's gotta be hungry. They usually are right out of the egg. I'm gonna be honest—I've actually been wanting to raise one myself, but finding an abandoned egg is super rare and *I can't believe El didn't fucking tell me*—"

"Dustin, my sister is upstairs, alone, with a baby creature that's not supposed to exist. Can we please go take care of that first before you talk about your best friend not telling you things?"

"Rule one: Friends don't lie."

"She probably didn't tell you because Holly already had the egg."

"Dammit." Dustin and I went upstairs, where we found Holly trying to comfort Smokey by stroking his soft baby scales.

He was... cute. In a I'll-grow-up-into-a-monster way.

"Hey, little guy," Dustin whispered, crouching by Holly and Smokey. "You hungry?"

"Downstairs with the meat, okay?" I asked.

"Okay. Holly, I need you to carry Smokey downstairs. He's imprinted on you."

Holly lugged the baby dragon (seriously, what the *fuck*, El?) downstairs and Dustin opened the package of meat, dropping some in front of Smokey. The newest addition to the Wheeler family ate it up and ended up eating the whole package. Dustin smiled.

"He's a hungry little bugger, isn't he?"

"Dustin, I can't buy a bunch of ground beef. It's too expensive."

"Well, if I had to guess, he's this hungry because he's a baby. They usually don't need to eat this much and they can go for months without eating, like a snake."

"Okay, so...?"

"Feed him a half-pound of ground beef a day and hope your mom doesn't find him."

"Yeah, that's helpful."

"You'd be surprised. I kept a Demodog in my house for a week before letting him go because he was too big. Dragons age slower."

"You kept a *Demodog* in your house?!"

I thought back to that thing from a couple weeks earlier. They were the nastiest thing to come out of the dark dimension that I had encountered. Most of the time, it was stuff like gnomes and fairies, but Dustin had told me about something even worse—the Demogorgon. They'd only ever encountered one, but one was enough. Apparently, they pretty much *ruled* the dark dimension and Dustin had theorized that one of them had taken Barbara Holland in 1983.

Maybe a dragon wasn't so bad. I just had to help Holly hide him from Mom, Joyce, Nancy, and Jonathan. Piece of cake.

Okay, no, I was screwed.